

Family Health History

Do you know your family health history?

If you don't, you should.

Health care professionals have known for a long time that common diseases (such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes) and rare diseases (like hemophilia, cystic fibrosis, and sickle cell anemia) can run in families. Knowing your family history will help you take steps to keep you and your family healthy.

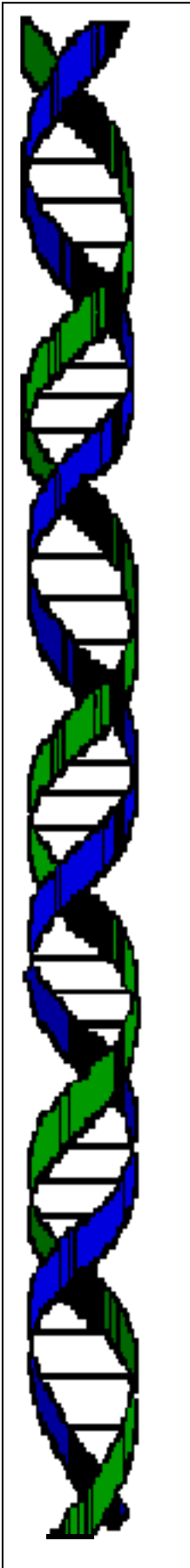
A family can learn much about its future health by examining its past. Many of the factors that will determine 1) how healthy we are, 2) which illnesses we will get, and 3) how long we will live, are inherited from our ancestors. The information contained in our family health history helps us to lower the chance we will get the same illnesses other family members had.

Many diseases and disorders have long been known to "run in families," but only recently has research shown us just how many diseases tend to run in families. It also provides us with the knowledge necessary to prevent and treat such illnesses. Genetic factors are the basis of all aspects of health and disease. Scientists have already identified over 2,000 genetic diseases, and the list keeps growing with new medical discoveries. Many other conditions, though not inherited, do tend to occur more frequently in some families than in others. It is common to talk about family traits when family members get together, but this information is rarely compiled into a permanent record.

The information gathered in a family health history can help you plan for good preventive health care (such as regular doctor check-ups) as well as make simple changes in eating habits and exercise. Certain family health patterns can alert you and your doctor to the fact that you need to be watching for early warning signs of a certain illness with regular monitoring tests. Early diagnosis and treatment can either cure or control many illnesses once thought to be incurable. Those with serious genetic illnesses in their backgrounds will find family health information helpful in making life choices (whether to have children, get married, etc.) Family medical information gathered now can help later generations take advantage of future medical discoveries.

One thing to keep in mind: **Family history comes from both your mother and your father. It is important to know the medical histories on both sides of the family.**

[CDC's information for the general public on family history.](#)



<http://www.cdc.gov/genomics/public/famhistMain.htm>

How to Collect Your Family History Information:

US Surgeon General's Family History Initiative, encouraging families to learn more about and collect their family health history.

<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/>